



Highlights of [GAO-05-935](#), a report to the Ranking Democratic Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

More Clarity on the Authority of Federal Security Directors Is Needed

Why GAO Did This Study

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) assigned Federal Security Directors (FSD) to oversee security, including the screening of passengers and their baggage, at the nation's more than 440 commercial airports. FSDs must work closely with stakeholders to ensure that airports are adequately protected and prepared in the event of a terrorist attack. This report addresses (1) the roles and responsibilities of FSDs and the clarity of their authority relative to that of other airport stakeholders during security incidents, (2) the extent to which FSDs formed and facilitated partnerships with airport stakeholders, and (3) FSDs' views of key changes TSA made to better support or empower the FSD position.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Homeland Security direct TSA to update its Delegation of Authority to FSDs and communicate this information to FSDs and airport stakeholders. The Department of Homeland Security generally concurred with GAO's findings and recommendations and described corrective actions that it has initiated or plans to take to address the issues identified.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-935.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (202) 512-8777 or Berrickc@gao.gov.

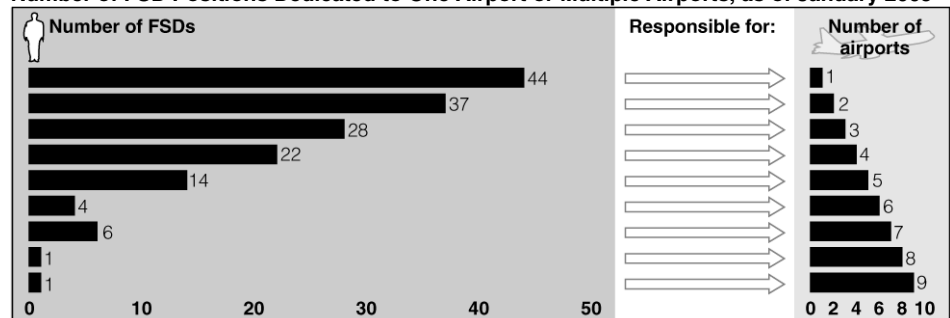
What GAO Found

TSA has issued guidance that clearly defines FSDs' roles and responsibilities. However, TSA's guidance related to FSDs' authority is outdated and lacks clarity regarding FSD authority relative to other airport stakeholders. TSA's document that delegates authority to FSDs gives them authority to supervise and deploy a TSA law enforcement force that was never established. Also, it does not clearly address FSD authority during a security incident relative to other parties with airport security responsibilities. At airports GAO visited, stakeholders said that this information had never been communicated to them and they were not always clear on the FSDs' authority in such situations. For example, confusion arose at one airport over whether the FSD had the authority to take certain actions during a security incident. In August 2005, TSA officials stated that they were updating guidance on FSDs' authority but had not finalized their revisions prior to this report's issuance.

All of the FSDs and most stakeholders at the airports GAO visited reported developing partnerships that were generally working well. Communication and coordination were taking place among stakeholders at these airports, including meetings, briefings, and training exercises. According to TSA, partnerships with airport stakeholders are essential to FSDs' success in addressing aviation security and customer service needs. For example, FSDs rely on law enforcement stakeholders during security incidents since they do not have their own law enforcement resources. FSDs also rely on air carriers for passenger volume information to schedule screeners, and air carriers rely on FSDs for efficient screening that minimizes passenger wait times.

TSA made changes in 2004 to better support or empower the FSD position, and most of the 25 FSDs we interviewed generally viewed these changes favorably. For example, most of the FSDs we interviewed were satisfied with TSA's new local hiring process that provided more options for FSDs to be involved in hiring screeners, and most said that the new process was better than the more centralized hiring process it replaced. Most FSDs we interviewed also saw value in the headquarters group TSA established to provide operational support to the field and a communication link among headquarters, field-based Area Directors, and FSDs.

Number of FSD Positions Dedicated to One Airport or Multiple Airports, as of January 2005



Source: GAO analysis of TSA data.